

DETERMINANTS OF SERVICE EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT: A PILOT TEST STUDY

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore a small sample data on antecedents of service employee commitment in Universiti Utara Malaysia. Hence, back translation, instrument validity, reliability and subsequently data normality was examined through a panel of experts and also by analysing a small sample data with the aid of SPSS software. The results showed that the instrument was reliable and the data for the preliminary study exhibited reasonable normality. The research explored and validated the instrument of the various antecedents of service employee commitment.

Keywords: *Service Employee Commitment, Internal Marketing Practices, Co worker Support*

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Introduction

Nowadays, higher education is becoming increasingly globalized and internationalized. The number of international students studying in Malaysian institutions of higher education is continuously growing. In a speech delivered by the Minister of Education Dato' Seri Mahdzir Khalid on Amanat Tahun Baru 2016, international students contributes towards their own success, campus diversity, campus internationalization and the economy of Malaysia

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especially when the students' total enrolment is expected to reach 200,000 per year which amounted to RM15.6 billion contributed to the country. Hence, all universities are encouraged to attract international students to enrol for their studies in Malaysia. Universiti Utara Malaysia or UUM, known as a management university with its vision, "To Be an Eminent Management University", has conducted many promotional activities to attract international students throughout the world. However, the number of international students in UUM show a declining trends compared to the increasing number of international students in Malaysia (Hui, 2014).

There are many factors that may affect international students' chosen university. One of the criteria is excellent service offer by the management (Chew, 2010). However, service is a perishable product which cannot be controlled by human beings (Wilson et al., 2012). Thus, the university staffs needs to reach the standards and always aim to deliver excellent services to the students. Commitment is key to the success of a service delivery (Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004). Thus, it is important to study the factors that may help to improve commitment of service so that the staff can consistently maintain delivering the best service to the students. It is hoped that through this research some policy recommendations can be drawn up to help UUM become a regional higher education hub.

Pilot Test

A pilot study is defined in two different ways in social science research; it could either be a small sample test or a trial test before proceeding to actual data collection (Polit et al., 2001). There are few justifications on previous research regarding sample size. Billingham et al., (2013) argued that some studies do not need sample size calculation. However, most researches done by the researchers of social science do have a sample size for their pilot test. For example, in the study by Baker (1994), it is sufficient to have 10-20% in sample size from the actual data size. Malhotra (2008) recommended that the sample size for pre-test is normally small, ranging from 15-30 respondents but is increased substantially if the test involves several stages.

Hence, a total of 48 copies of questionnaires were personally distributed to Jabatan Penyelenggaraan UUM, Unit Keselamatan UUM, Jabatan Bendahari, Jabatan Hal Ehwal Akademik, Jabatan Pendaftar and Othman Yeop Abdullah School. The responses from the respondents were very supportive as 48 copies of questionnaires were successfully returned. Two questionnaires were received after the deadline and was thus, not included in the pilot analysis. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010) the most popular test of inter-item consistency reliability is Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Hence, the Cronbach alpha test was employed in this study to measure internal consistency of the instrument. The data was analysed using SPSS version 14 for Windows. Before the distribution of the questionnaires, the draft was initially submitted to experts and typical respondent for face and content validity.

Researchers are advised to conduct pilot test before proceeding to actual data. One of the advantages is that the results from the pilot test would give early indication of the actual data process and results. The researcher may address the few problems that may occur during the actual data collection. The protocol might be different to the actual data process and the researcher may become aware of the process before proceeding to real data collection.

Regarding the instruments, the researcher needs to consider a few points particularly on the language and the words. In this pilot test study, the respondents are mostly Malay. Hence, the instruments through back to back translation translated by an expert. Regarding the process among the staffs of UUM, the surveys were left for few hours at the respondents' offices to give sufficient time for them to answered the survey and avoid bias. For this reason, the response rate from the respondents was quite good. Therefore, the importance of the pilot study is actually to improve the quality and efficiency of primary studies (Teijlingen et al., 2001).

Literature Review

Service Employee Commitment

There are multiple definitions of service employee commitment found in literature (Wainaina *et al.*, 2014). Service employee commitment is originally conceptualized by Porter and Steers (1973). The basic understanding of their study is that commitment is rooted in the attitudes of each individual in the organization. Attitudes reflect a person's likes and dislikes and their activities in the organization (Tosi & Mero, 2003). On the other hand, Davis and Newstrom (1989) defined attitude as an employee's feelings on how they perceived their environment. Service employee commitment is first categorized by Porter *et al.* (1974) into three factors which are i) belief and acceptance of organizational goals and its values; ii) willingness to pay extra effort; and iii) to sustain organizational membership .

Meyer and Allen (1991) then came out with many more comprehensive service employee commitment models which have been highlighted in many articles and by many scholars for the last 20 years across multiple domains (Kroth, 2007). They developed three popular dimensions called; i) affective commitment, ii) continuance commitment and iii) normative commitment. Affective commitment involved employee emotional attachment towards work, continuance commitment is a commitment based on the costs if the employee leaves the organization and normative commitment is an employee's feelings of obligation to stay with the organization.

Among these three dimensions, affective commitment has received the most attention by scholars and received better support (Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004; Emery & Barker, 2007; Clark *et al.*, 2008). Previous studies have proven that affective commitment was inferred to have the same effect on service employee commitment towards service quality (Clark *et al.*, 2008; Hartline & Ferrel, 1996). They are related to the element of desired and emotional attachment of the service employee to provide quality service and meet customer needs and wants. Hence it would be fruitful to study this relationship as previous research has been focused more on the commitment of other issues for example, organizational citizenship behaviour, absenteeism and turnover.

Internal Marketing Practices

Consequently, the human factor in service delivery remains as one of the great challenges and employers have realized that the performance of employees is a great determinant of the

competency of the organization (Anupama, 2015). It therefore became essential for organisations to identify the elements of the work environment, as perceived by employees, which are linked to critically important organisational outcomes (Scotti and Harmon, 2014). A body of literature known as linkage research examines these links and tries to explain how employees' descriptions of their work environment influence important performance factors with an internal marketing concept.

The internal marketing concept was first proposed in the mid-1970s as a way of achieving service quality. One of the basic concepts of internal marketing behaviour practices is the notion of internal exchange between service employees and the organisation (Anupama, 2015). Internal marketing is defined as "viewing employees as internal customers, viewing and jobs as internal products that satisfy the needs and wants of these internal customers while addressing the objectives of the firm" (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991).

Generally, internal marketing practices behaviour practices seek to provide stability between service employees' views of what they have given to their work and the views of what they will get from their work (Lings & Greenley, 2005). The nature of service industries, which cannot separate the service provider from the service delivery, significantly requires the implementation of internal marketing behaviour practices. In the service industries, motivated, satisfied and committed front-line service employees are crucial factors that contribute to a good service delivery and in return, the satisfaction of the customers (Joung *et al.*, 2015). Hence it would be interesting to examine the relationship of internal marketing practices on service employee commitment (Huang & Thiele, 2015).

Co-worker Support

There are many concepts of co-worker support in literature such as from Zhou and George (2001) who referred co-worker support to the act of helping each other in the line duty to provide encouragement and inspiration by means of sharing skill and knowledge. For instance Scott and Bruce (1994) in their study illustrated that a service employee might face difficulties in a defined task, and the solution to this task is unavailable. Thus, other co-workers can offer their knowledge and skills to solve the problem.

This illustration was also supported by Woodman *et al.*, (1993) in which service employees obtain co-worker support in the form of task-relevant skill and expertise which will aid easy problem solution in the organization. Another insight was given by Joiner and Bakalis (2006) that a healthy workplace atmosphere and environment can be created when workers within such workplace practice co-worker support in form of openness, helping other colleagues and showing care for each other. Also, it was observed that co-worker support enhances workers to solve problems easily with a positive zeal to ensure productivity in the workplace.

Therefore, it was concluded that easy problem solution and successful task completion within a workplace is associated with co-worker support. Similar arguments were made by Susskind *et al.*, (2003) and Susskind *et al.*, (2000) in which service employees rely on help

from other co-workers to provide work-related assistance to meet their respective service-related activities.

Also, Ladd and Henry (2000) pointed out that co-worker support is based on workers' beliefs and attitudes toward each other and is seen in their relationship with one another. Therefore it was suggested that perceived co-worker support is the determinant of perceived organizational support. This is because the organization consists of workers and their relationship and behaviour reflects organizational behaviour. Hence the study of the relationship between co-worker support and service employee commitment is suggested (Limpanitgul *et al.*, 2014).

Methodology

Measurement

The original instrument for service employee commitment to service quality items were drawn from two studies mainly from the quality management and the organizational commitment scale by Mowday *et al.*, (1979). A recent modified version by Clark *et al.*, (2008) was adapted in this study. The instrument contained nine items in total. All the constructs of service employee commitment in this study were measured using a five-point Likert Scale, which ranged from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The construct and the measurement of internal marketing behaviour practices were adapted from the work of Huang and Thiele (2015). They categorised internal marketing behaviour practices into three components, which are internal communication, training and internal market research. The instrument contained 18 items. All of the items in the constructs of internal marketing behaviour practices in this study were measured using a five-point Likert Scale, which ranged from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The co-worker support construct and measurement were adapted from Ladd and Henry (2000). The items of the construct contained nine items. All of the items were measured using a five-point Likert Scale, which ranged from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

Analysis

Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile characteristics under investigation include gender, marital status, race, age, education level and number of working years. The sample indicated that female respondents represented a higher percentage of the total samples 73% compared to male respondents 27%. Most of the staffs are married 79% and 21% are single. All the staffs for this pilot test is Malay. Majority of the respondents' ages were between 25 to 35 years 48%. About 29% were between 36 to 50 years of age. 17 % of the respondents were below 25 while 6 % were above 50 years of age.

Back Translation

From reviewing related literature, the present work found back-translation as an effective technique for the translation of a data collection instrument. Generally, back-translation is considered as the first step the researcher should take when conducting a research of either a pilot study or the main one, and particularly when using an original questionnaire in a different language. However, two bilingual experts, who preferably should be familiar with the content of the material of the data collection instrument, should conduct the translation; one translating from the source to the target language, while the second blindly translating back from the target to the source (Brislin, 1970). On this point, this context of the study has appointed the Language Center of UUM to translate the English language items to the official language, Bahasa Malaysia.

Content Validity

Content validity is used to assess the measurement instruments done in the pre-test stage by soliciting the expert opinions of academicians who are research specialists in quantitative methodology, organizational behaviour and service management disciplines. The content was also validated by the staff from the industry to seek their opinions and some adjustments had been made on language and term use.

Reliability Test

Various types of reliability tests are usually employed, however, the common method used by researchers is the internal consistency reliability test (Litwin, 1995). It is the extent to which items “hang together as a set” and are capable of independently measuring the same concept to the extent that the items are correlated with one another. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010) the most popular test of inter-item consistency reliability is Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Hence, the Cronbach’s alpha test was employed in this study to measure internal consistency of the instrument. After running the data using SPSS version 14 for Windows, it was found that all the measures possessed high reliability standards ranging from 0.713 to 0.956.

This is in line with the benchmark that an instrument with a coefficient of 0.60 is regarded as having an average reliability while the coefficient of 0.70 and above shows that the instrument has a high reliability standard (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Hair *et al.*, (2007) observed that researchers generally consider the an alpha value of 0.70 as the minimum, however, lower coefficients may be acceptable. Table 1 shows the summary of the reliability results. As shown in the table the results of pilot test indicated that Cronbach’s alpha values for the constructs under investigation are all above 0.70. Consequently, given the established benchmark of 0.70 all the constructs were reliable and therefore, there was no need to delete any item.

Table 1.0
Reliability result

No	Variable	Reliability
1	Internal Communication	0.85
2	Training	0.87
3	Internal Marketing Research	0.87
4	Co-worker Support	0.73
5	Service Employee Commitment	0.72

Data Distribution

Most of the inferential statistical techniques require the fulfilment of normality assumption (Pallant, 2001; Tabacknich & Fidell, 2007). Normal data is one that is symmetrical and bell-shaped, with the greatest frequency of scores in the middle and a smaller distribution towards the extreme ends. Normality can be examined by using the values of skewness and kurtosis. While skewness has to do with symmetry, kurtosis indicates the extent to which the data is peaked or flat (Tabacknich & Fidell, 2007). Based on the values of skewness and kurtosis the data can be described as reasonably normal. For example, the skewness of all the items ranged from -0.013 to 1.099 which was below ± 2.0 . Similarly, the values for kurtosis ranged from -0.031 to 2.572 which was well below the threshold of ± 10 .

Conclusion

As noted earlier the aim of this study was to pre-test the validity and reliability of the instrument of an ongoing project in preparation for a large scale study. Hence, the conclusion of this study is tied to its objective which is mainly statistical in nature at this stage. The managerial implication of the variables under investigation would be fully uncovered after the main study is carried out. The study explored small scale data that was collected during the pilot test. Both content and face validity were conducted which subsequently led to the rewording of several items and two items were removed on grounds of high similarity with other questions. Furthermore, the inter-item reliability test revealed that all the items were reliable with the Cronbach's alpha was well above the benchmark; thereby no item was deleted. Finally, the normality test using skewness and kurtosis showed that the data as a whole was reasonably normal especially with skewness values not significantly different from zero.

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